

# **International Constraints and Indigenous Strengths in Preventive Development**

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I agree with Brady Anderson's guidance that "USAID's development policy and portfolio include integrated interventions aimed at addressing the effects of underlying social, economic and political problems." My point of departure is that the only real prevention of conflict is root cause development, and that this cannot be separated from—but is closely connected to and part of—the crucial stage of post-conflict mitigation and rebuilding efforts. I will attempt to consider the implications for this proposition in three parts: the international "outside" perspective; the outlook from "inside" the crisis country; and where, broadly, combining these two points of view brings us.

## **I**

There are several identifiable challenges in the current post-war international environment which require changes by the international community in order for it to provide effective development assistance to mitigate or prevent conflict.

First, it must be recognized that the task of assisting unstable developing states, whether "failed" or not, whether vulnerable to or already damaged by conflict, is almost unimaginably huge. The successful "encouragement of indigenous development of institutions and processes to help societies change in peaceful ways," quoting from Dr. Lute's paper, is as awesome an objective as it is admirable. But, the problem is we pretend otherwise—partly out of reality denial, partly because we know we are unable to respond proportionally, and partly to be able to sustain hopefulness—and thereby reduce our characterization of the magnitude and complexity of the problem to the approximate level of the various assets we are capable of devoting to the task: political will and support, money, troops, time. This is by nature distorting, inflates expectations, won't work, and results in recrimination.

Second, the fundamental definition of self-interest on the part of the strongest, richest, most active members of the international community must expand, or deepen, so as to encompass the kind of phenomena we are considering here. It is not now sufficiently inclusive as to include limiting the implications of conflict in susceptible nations. Such a sense of essential connectedness or the lack thereof will to a great degree dictate the eventual outcome of our efforts here. My own opinion is that perceiving the gap in the world between the haves and the have-nots as directly compromising our own needs is an essential element of an enriched conception of national interest, and that less squeamishness in inserting our ideals into the definition of our livelihood so as to recognize these urgent problems beyond our borders is also required. In any event, the prospect of such a strengthened concept of national interests is daunting.

Third, the international actors, whether acting multilaterally or bilaterally, tend not to adjust their own notions and designs enough to be consistent with the particulars on the

ground—the culture, capabilities and evolution extant in the afflicted country. In the need to achieve the right balance, roles and chemistry in the mutually reinforcing relationships desirable between the “outside” offerings and the “inside” realities, much more emphasis must be given the latter. In seeking a redemptive mix between what we want and what works for them, indeed recognizing that our programs are marginal rather than determining, we must do a better job of matching in their direction. For instance, the external players need to compromise on their preferences for fast democracy and early exit. I believe that democratization cannot be seriously undertaken without large amounts of social and economic development, and the patience and time for both to happen, and this goes against our grain.

Fourth, the current priorities of the major international actors place development assistance of any variety, whether transitional or longer-term, last behind political, humanitarian and security efforts. These other priorities should be designed and carried out so as to support development efforts, but aren’t. As I’ve indicated, developmental assistance must be interpreted, translated, operationalized into post-conflict peace-building. This also means that humanitarian operations, transitional development assistance and longer-term development programs need to be carefully synchronized— there is too much natural overlap and interaction for them to be pursued in isolation from one another, let alone with the pernicious disdain or worse which too much reflect their relationships now. Finally, development must be integral, organic, competitive within U.S. foreign policy in the situations we are considering here, rather than a rhetorical ornament or afterthought, if we are to deal with them seriously.

## II

In order to portray the outlook from “inside” the crisis countries in question to help define a good way for us to work in unstable post-conflict transitions, I am going to use illustratively the War-Torn Societies Project. WSP (now WSP-International) was founded in Geneva by Matthias Stiefel about five years ago for the express purpose of providing post-conflict rehabilitation assistance in a feasible manner expressly oriented to the needs and capacities of the indigenous actors. It believed that existing mandates relating mostly to natural disasters, refugee flows and conflicts between states and the traditional mechanisms available to carry them out were insufficient to deal with the dynamics of poor, conflict-prone, often ethnically stricken countries struggling for recovery, stability and progress. It has set up programs operating since in Mozambique, Eritrea, Guatemala and Somalia. It receives political and financial support from a number of donor states and U.N. agencies.

The essential methodology of this U.N.-linked NGO is to support the creation and working of a process of local participatory priority-setting, consensus-building, and program-designing including all the stakeholders of rehabilitation programs. A collective mechanism seeks to achieve the collaborative contributions of the national or regional government, civil society, former adversaries, victims and victimizers, ethnic groups and others. It has a major action research component to provide relevant data, analysis and substantive expertise for the collaborative decision-making effort. Representatives of the international donor community in the country are kept fully informed and have active in-put to this process, but do not sit at the table. The government representatives do not dominate. The leaders of the process and its staff are all indigenous. If this works, the outcome is not only concrete rehabilitation undertakings

with the necessary political support for implementation already built-in, but real progress toward reconciliation and democratization.

In summary, WSP-I thus attempts to serve as a catalyst to get a process started in figuring out how to be a viable nation state. Its essential principles are: to deal pragmatically and programmatically with particular local needs by creating a neutral space for the active engagement of participants from all aspects of society, and to assure the partnership and support of international actors in such a way that they will not pre-empt. This methodology requires adaptability, mutual respect and trust, evocation rather than imposition, lean international staff, close observation, timely funding, and the withdrawal of WSP-I when the process has taken hold except for on-call assistance at the request of a local successor body.

### III

In bringing together these two outlooks—“outside” international and “inside” indigenous – in order to learn more about working to help in unstable conflict-related situations what do we find, what do we face? Trouble.

The main problem, in my opinion, is that the kind of changes in commitment, motivation and performance indicated as necessary in my comments concerning the international community are not going to happen significantly in the foreseeable future. If this speculation is true, then what do we do?

First, we keep trying as best we can, without breaking our picks or our hearts, to bring over time the desired outside changes to come about. But, second, we do not act in the meantime as if they surely will, let alone that they already have. Third, of course we should press the new policies which we are now learning are valuable toward programs in, and relationships with, the indigenous conditions, actors and assets inside the recipient countries in need.

But our overall mode should express its devotion with some caution and deliberation, not trying to force too much too soon in the way of radical policy change or structural bureaucratic revision. This isn't defeatist, and it is smart. A lot of time can be wasted and wheels spun to no avail, with immediate opportunities missed. Here, the political constraints and the bureaucratic stubbornness can be ferocious; from working over time in the U.S. government and the U.N., I know. In the field, even if we have a new model which is right doesn't mean it will work; and the implementation is all that counts. We need to avoid getting out ahead of ourselves, ahead even of what David Hamburg characterizes as the human condition, even as we try to elevate it. As we push forward, we need to respect what exists, the limitations of our assumed knowledge and the presumption of our power, and the incredible complexity involved—not just at the same time pursuing our ideals but in order that they survive. We've got to effect the change we want by building on rather than renouncing, pursuing real, not concocted opportunities, taking advantage of existing momentum to advance the progress we want.

An advantage of not trying to do too much too fast and not inflating expectations for ourselves and others—being more effectively resolute by practicing greater realism and honesty—is that then the message is conveyed more credibly to the local actors that they cannot

rely on us to do very much and that they must do the job themselves, to get their own act together. The outside-inside equilibrium in this respect could benefit.

I agree with the statement in Mr. Pherson's paper that success will depend on how quickly and effectively specific questions concerning resources and mechanics such as the ones he identifies can be answered, although I believe it will depend even more on what degree the major shareholders inhibit their own drives, cultures and politics. Among the new choices which can be made, a critical one is to get more attention—and that includes resources—given to the transition phase which follows conflict and the intense injection of emergency humanitarian relief. Too much emphasis on preventive development through more conventional longer-term assistance leaves a big gap.

Finally, what are the three most needed commodities in our new paradigm? William James made a good start when he identified the three most important human qualities as: kindness, kindness, kindness. When we were trying to get WSP underway we thought of three more: process, process, process. But, here, in the context of today's deliberation are yet three others: time, time, time.